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# Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

**Summary record of the 21st meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 2 November 2016, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Drobnjak ..... (Croatia)

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Agenda item 49: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

**Agenda item 49: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East** (A/71/13, A/71/335, A/71/340, A/71/343 and A/71/350)

1. **The Chair** said that, for years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had been at the forefront in responding to the protracted situation of Palestine refugees, who accounted for over 40 per cent of long-term refugees. As it entered its sixty-seventh year, the Agency provided essential services to 5.3 million Palestine refugees across the Middle East, but its funding shortfall of $74 million had jeopardized its ability to provide its core services for the second year in a row. Member States had a collective responsibility to ensure sustainable and predictable funding for the Agency so that it could continue to fulfil its mandate.

2. The Agency's staff of 30,000 had made a remarkable contribution to human development in the Middle East, the eradication of communicable diseases such as polio and tuberculosis, and universal enrolment and literacy for refugee children in UNRWA schools. Amid conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, repeated surges of violence and the ongoing blockade in Gaza, the Agency continued to implement humanitarian and development programmes which had helped many Palestine refugees to escape poverty. The Agency had also been invaluable in providing a sense of hope and dignity to that vulnerable community, pending a lasting solution to their plight in accordance with United Nations resolutions. However, the Agency's accomplishments should not be taken for granted. It worked in one of the most polarized and conflict-ridden regions of the world and had been the first responder in five wars over the previous decade alone, losing more than 30 staff members since 2013. Member States should be proud of the Agency's achievements but it needed their ongoing support.

*Statement by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA*

3. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that UNRWA had a responsibility to sound the alarm on behalf of the community of Palestine refugees that was sinking into the abyss under its very watch at a time when the Middle East was reeling under the effects of multiple armed conflicts with catastrophic consequences in human terms on a scale not seen since the Second World War.

4. The conditions facing the 5.3 million Palestine refugees were worse than at any time since 1948, and the absence of a political horizon was draining them of resolve and creativity. Fifty years of occupation and ten years of a blockade in full view of the international community were etched painfully into the refugees' identity. More importantly, however, a young generation of Palestine refugees was growing up and losing faith in the value of politics, compromise and international diplomacy. Once the dust had settled from the crises in the region, the scars of Gaza, Hebron, East Jerusalem and Nablus, as well as the pain and suffering of Ein El-Helweh, Nahr el-Bared and Yarmouk, and the abuse and despair of Palestine refugees, would continue to stare the world in the face and with greater intensity.

5. In the Syrian Arab Republic, over 60 per cent of the 560,000 refugees resident at the start of conflict in 2011 had been displaced, and some 120,000 had fled the country altogether. Most of the camps where the refugees had taken shelter since 1948 had sustained significant damage. Palestine refugees struggled to survive amid the destructive violence of armed opposition groups and the effects of Government artillery fire.

6. In Gaza, children as young as nine had lived through three extremely violent conflicts over the previous eight years alone, and 2 million people — of whom 1.3 million were Palestine refugees — saw every facet of their lives defined by the illegal blockade. Freedom of movement was virtually non-existent, and some 90 per cent of the Agency's 260,000 students in the Gaza Strip had never left it. Unemployment affected a staggering 60 to 65 per cent of all youth and an even greater percentage of young women.

7. While the physical consequences of successive wars in Gaza and the lack of progress towards reconstruction were clear, there was no way to assess the psychological scars and depth of despair among young people and the causes of the unprecedented rise in the suicide rate. Even the older generation of business people, who had been historically pro-peace, had been driven into poverty under the extreme import and export restrictions, joining the 930,000 people in Gaza who received food assistance. While the world focused on the ravages of wars in the Syrian Arabic Republic, Iraq and Yemen, the situation in Gaza was being seriously underestimated and was irreconcilable with human dignity or the security of anyone in the region.

8. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, there was a different version of despair among Palestine refugees. Military rule and occupation defined every aspect of public and private life and entailed military incursions, restrictions on the movement of both people and goods, and punitive house demolitions. The continued and illegal settlement expansion was only making the situation worse. Military occupation was a potent incubator of hate and extremism, and something against which oppressed people would react. The Secretary-General condemned all violence against civilians, including the acts of violence inflicted on Israeli civilians in the wake of the protests held in October 2015.

9. In addition to the cumulative human toll of the occupation on Palestinians, the economic toll was also staggering. The United Nations had conservatively estimated that, in Area C of the West Bank alone, $4 billion in Palestinian income was lost each year as a result of the Israeli military occupation. In 2010, Palestinian economists had estimated annual losses of $6.8 billion for Gaza and the entire West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which vastly exceeded the generous sums received in humanitarian and development funding from donors. Despite those generous donations, the economic base of Palestine was being continually eroded, drastically limiting any potential for sustainable economic growth and job creation.

10. The dire situation was all the more worrying given that the majority of young Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had been born after the Oslo Accords, which had promised a just and lasting solution in the form of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. The failure to achieve that solution meant that an entire generation was at risk of losing faith in political processes and diplomacy. It was therefore imperative for the international community to take decisive action to re-establish a much-needed political horizon.

11. Jordan was the only field of operation in which UNRWA could count on stability and focus on its core activities. In Lebanon, high rates of poverty and unemployment were the primary challenge for the Agency and a source of extreme hardship for Palestine refugees, who were excluded from the formal employment sector and lacked access to most public services. In coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL), UNRWA advocated directly for refugee labour rights and maintained a productive and strong relationship with the Lebanese Government.

12. The risks of radicalization of desperate young people in the region were huge, but few young Palestinians had answered the calls of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and similar groups. Nonetheless, the international community should take steps to reduce the sense of insecurity felt by Palestinians and should recommit to helping to meet their development and humanitarian needs.

13. UNRWA therefore navigated a complex and deeply unstable environment as it delivered its core education, health and poverty mitigation services, and mounted large emergency operations to 1.3 million people in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the Syrian Arab Republic. It maintained stable delivery of essential services to the refugees throughout 59 official camps and refugee-majority communities in the field. Its size, reach and targeting were unique in the United Nations system and it was a hybrid body that was able to carry out both humanitarian and development functions separately or simultaneously using existing infrastructure and staff. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Agency was reaching 95 per cent of the refugees in need of cash assistance as part of its emergency intervention. It had increased attendance in Agency schools and had rebuilt two schools that had been destroyed in Qabr Essit camp. In Yarmouk, UNRWA had helped 120 students to sit for the national exams in summer 2016. A recent World Bank report had found that UNRWA schools outperformed the national schools by a year.

14. Despite the extraordinary challenges facing UNRWA in the field, the Agency had rolled out the major reforms in its medium-term strategy for 2016-2021 in the first half of 2016 rather than staggering them over the entire six-year period. In April 2016, it had introduced its new "food to cash" programme in Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank. Instead of being distributed in bulk, food was being distributed through electronic e-cards to some 160,000 eligible refugees, which empowered refugees by giving them the freedom to choose their own food. It was hoped that the new system would enable UNRWA to mobilize more resources and provide food to a larger number of vulnerable refugees.

15. Given that UNRWA worked in a landscape rife with political and security tensions, it was constantly assessing the scale and complexity of operational challenges. Amidst those challenges, its leadership had taken robust and difficult measures to control and, where possible, reduce costs, lowering spending to a bare minimum without cutting fundamental core services. It had reduced its 2016 shortfall by $54 million and had produced a zero-growth budget.

Despite those measures, however, the Agency faced a shortfall of $74 million and its financial situation remained a cause for serious concern.

16. New mechanisms were needed to put UNRWA on a more stable financial footing. While the Agency was grateful to donors and hosts for their remarkable support, the current system did not provide the necessary predictability of funding and placed the stability of the Middle East and the extraordinary progress achieved over several decades at risk. The humanitarian, political and security priorities of UNRWA stakeholders were not being served by the financial crises or by the annual process of bridging the gaps. The General Assembly played a critical role in finding ways to provide financial stability for the Agency. One way was through increased support from the United Nations regular budget, but that possibility did not enjoy universal support among Member States. However, it was clear that collective action was required to find concrete ways to fulfil the commitment made to Palestine refugees.

17. UNRWA had invested significant time in exploring different avenues to achieve financial stability. In coordination with the Secretary-General and donor partners, major outreach efforts had been undertaken with non-traditional donors over the previous 18 months. The Agency was also in contact with the World Bank about collaborating on trust fund financing for education. In recent years, it had tapped into private, charitable and foundation resources, and was leaving no stone unturned in the quest for broad and diverse support.

18. It was very encouraging to see the commitments made by Member States in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The Agency's crippling financial situation and the many discussions on how to address it presented a timely opportunity to initiate implementation of the Declaration with regard to Palestine refugees.

19. Approximately half of the Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA were young people under the age of 25. Beyond the nine or ten years of education obtained by 500,000 boys and girls in UNRWA schools, very few could contemplate real opportunities in life, which was unacceptable and deeply concerning in an environment where currents of extremism swept through the region. The international community had a collective responsibility to protect Palestine refugee youth from such risks. A remarkable institution in the education system was UNRWA's school parliaments. School parliamentarians in UNRWA's five fields of operations were democratically elected students whose activities revealed a spirit of civic responsibility. Five of them had recently addressed an UNRWA senior management meeting. During the Secretary-General's most recent visit to Gaza in June 2016, he had met with the central school parliament of Gaza. Those exchanges had revealed that the students sometimes understood better than adults that the education provided by UNRWA schools was not an act of charity, but an exercise of a right.

*Interactive dialogue*

20. **Mr. Roet** (Israel) said that his Government would continue to support the Agency's humanitarian activities, but believed that those activities could be carried out in a much more effective way. It was regrettable that the Organization's important work was overshadowed by its constant use of humanitarian funding for the purposes of advocacy and promotion of the Palestinian narrative. Unfortunately, both the Commissioner-General's statement and his report (A/71/13) had provided an unbalanced and inaccurate description of the situation of Palestine refugees throughout the Middle East. UNRWA was mandated to promote the welfare of Palestine refugees but that mandate did not allow it to conduct itself in a way that promoted a one-sided, biased approach. His delegation strongly objected to the comparison made between Israel and Syria as a result of the Commissioner-General's remark that Jordan, unlike those two countries, was the only field of operations in which UNRWA could focus on its core activities.

21. The Commissioner-General's report also failed to include information about the ten or more UNRWA employees who had been actively inciting violence against Israelis on social media. Israel had provided a detailed account of the situation in 2015, but had only received the vague response that the issue was under investigation. His delegation wondered when the Agency, which preached about the need for accountability, would show greater transparency and reveal the findings of its investigation, how it had addressed that serious situation and the steps it would take to prevent it from reoccurring.

22. The report referred to the volatile security situation in Gaza, which was partially attributed to the constant firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, but failed to mention who was responsible for those attacks and merely alluded to the de facto authorities. His delegation requested the Commissioner-General to clarify the identity of the so-called de facto authorities, and to explain why the Agency could not speak about Hamas and its activities. Doing so would send the right message and might

assist Palestine refugees under the control of a terrorist organization. The report failed to mention Hamas terrorist activities, the theft of rehabilitation material or the horrific human rights situation of the people of Gaza. On the other hand, it indicated that there had been a lack of progress towards reconstruction in Gaza. That cynical choice of words contradicted what had been reported by other United Nations agencies, and did not mention the support provided by Israel in that reconstruction. While much remained to be done, that criticism was uncalled for and was constant in the report.

23. With regard to the restrictions on the movement of goods into and out of Gaza, the report highlighted the additional costs incurred by the Agency in monitoring the movement of construction material, but did not take into account the broader context and the security considerations which had led to their introduction. Hamas regularly confiscated, diverted and smuggled materials intended for the reconstruction of Gaza and used them to dig tunnels, build training camps and manufacture rockets. Blaming Israel for protecting itself might allow UNRWA staff easier access into Gaza but it would not help the Palestinian people.

24. The report criticized the restrictions on the movement of UNRWA personnel and the vehicle searches at crossings. However, Israel had legitimate security concerns, and the restrictions had been imposed because of real threats. The constant firing of rockets and the several tunnels which had collapsed during the reporting period attested to the fact that Hamas was actively preparing for another conflict. Moreover, Hamas had been known to exploit humanitarian agencies and divert materials to strengthen its military capabilities. In October 2016, humanitarian workers from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations had been indicted for assisting Hamas.

25. The section of the report addressing the situation in Syria indicated that aid deliveries to the Yarmouk refugee camp had been cut off and that access to adjacent areas had been suspended, but failed to mention that the camp had been besieged by the Syrian Government. Of the 40 UNRWA staff members killed in 2016, 14 had been killed in Syria, where, as at December 2015, an additional 28 had been missing, detained, kidnapped or presumed to have been detained. He expressed his condolences to UNRWA and to the families of those killed and hoped for the early return of the staff missing in Syria.

26. The report did not address who was responsible for harming UNRWA staff, and his Government wished to know whether there had been an investigation into those employees' well-being. In stark contrast with its sections on Israel, the report did not attribute any wrongdoing to any faction, organization or individual. The Commissioner-General should clarify who had kidnapped no fewer than 30 UNRWA staff members and who was responsible for the killing of 14 others. The international community needed to know, and the Agency should report the facts as they were without political consideration. His delegation wished to know whether accountability was required only of one Member State or of all States.

27. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the United Nations had a permanent responsibility to ensure that the question of Palestine was justly resolved and the rights of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, were fulfilled in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The mandate of UNRWA constituted a major component of that responsibility, and her delegation appreciated the Agency's vital humanitarian work in support of the Palestine refugees over nearly seven decades.

28. It was difficult to understand how calls for justice, dignity and rights, including for Palestine refugees, could be seen as one-sided or biased. Only a just solution would enable the Palestinian people to overcome the grave injustices that they had endured for far too long and provide for stability, security and peace in the Middle East and beyond. The Commissioner-General had demonstrated adept leadership and had undertaken significant outreach efforts in the face of persistent structural underfunding, recurrent financial shortfalls and deteriorating socioeconomic, humanitarian and security conditions.

29. Although an overwhelming majority of Palestine refugees had stayed in the region for years awaiting a just solution to their plight, worsening conditions had compelled many to leave in search of security and a better life. The Commissioner-General was requested to provide further information on that trend, including statistics on the refugee exodus. In addition, her delegation wondered what actions the Agency had undertaken to address the vulnerabilities of the Palestine refugee population, in particular as a result of the Syrian crisis, and to provide stability within that community.

30. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) asked the Commissioner-General how the Agency's relief and

development work contributed to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals with respect to the Palestine refugee population. His delegation also wished to know what immediate coping strategies had been or would be implemented by the Agency to expand or diversify its donor base in the face of serious funding difficulties.

31. **Ms. Dris** (Malaysia) asked the Commissioner-General to provide further information on the situation of Palestine refugees residing in Syrian camps, as well as of those who had fled the Syrian Arab Republic to camps in Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere in the region. Her delegation also wished to know how the Agency was supporting the Palestine refugees remaining in the Syrian Arab Republic in terms of shelter, health care, education and other essential humanitarian services.

32. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that the Agency had been given a clear mandate to protect Palestine refugees in its various areas of operation. That included engaging in dialogue with all relevant parties, including the Israeli security forces, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and the Governments of Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, on issues relating to the respect, or lack of respect, of the rights of those refugees. The Agency's first course of action was always to raise matters of concern with the Governments and responsible actors on the ground by initiating face-to-face dialogue. Public advocacy and raising awareness of the situation of Palestine refugees was standard practice for UNRWA and would continue to be part of the Agency's work.

33. The Agency had acknowledged and documented the staff social media posts inciting violence. However, given that such conduct concerned only 0.5 per cent of staff members, the practice could hardly be said to be widespread. It was nonetheless considered serious and the Agency held itself accountable. It had engaged with staff through training and other internal preventive measures to highlight what was acceptable in their public and private use of social media.

34. In response to the claim by the Israeli representative that UNRWA reports failed to refer to Hamas, he recalled his lengthy experience in international humanitarian law, one of the distinct features of which compared to other types of international law was its universal applicability to both State and non-State actors. He had no reservations when it came to referring to any armed group and was the only senior United Nations official to have condemned the firing of rockets from Gaza during the 2014 war.

35. UNRWA treated the theft of Agency construction material as a very serious matter and had engaged frequently with the Israeli Government and security forces to determine whether there was any evidence that Agency materials had been used in the construction of tunnels in Gaza. Inspections had been carried out at the end of the 2014 war and the security forces had indicated clearly that there was no such evidence. He had accepted that response as an official position but would nonetheless continue to follow up on any future allegations made. He was the first to step in to take corrective action if it was needed.

36. The Israeli representative had misunderstood his comment regarding the lack of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. The Agency had received only 39 per cent of the funding necessary to rebuild and could complete light reconstruction in just six months if it had the resources it had requested. The homes of approximately 9,000 Palestinian refugee families in the Gaza Strip had been fully destroyed and, in addition to financial constraints, the Agency had faced further challenges in rebuilding as a result of the import restrictions imposed by Israel on wood and other items that the country had listed as dual-use items. His comments to that effect had been purely factual and had been intended to explain why reconstruction could not advance or be completed; they had not been intended as criticism.

37. With regard to the movement restrictions imposed by Israel on both Agency staff and Palestine refugees, Israel clearly faced real security issues. However, every State involved in armed conflict was responsible for reconciling the security measures taken to protect its citizens with its obligations under international humanitarian law. The blockade of Gaza amounted to collective punishment, and the Government of Israel should realize that there were consequences to the measures it had taken to protect its security.

38. The Agency had no doubt that the Syrian Government was responsible for the siege of Yarmouk, nor had it failed to address that fact. Since the beginning of the Syrian war, 18 of its staff members had been killed and another 25 were missing. In addition, 11 colleagues had been killed during the 50-day conflict in Gaza. It was deeply troubling to have incurred so many losses in Gaza and the Syrian Arab Republic, but it was not his place to lay blame on any particular party. In Gaza, that was a matter of public record. In the case of the Syrian Arab Republic, it was difficult to identify the party responsible. In instances where staff members were presumed to be held in Government detention centres, he had

intervened at senior levels with Government officials and had obtained some releases. However, responsibility was not limited to a single actor in the international system or in UNRWA practice, and in its dialogue with Israel the Agency would always point to specific cases for which it believed Israel was accountable.

39. An estimated 120,000 of the 560,000 Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic had fled the country, of whom 31,000 were now in Lebanon and 16,000 were now in Jordan. Both countries had since closed their borders to Palestine refugees, and those forced to flee the Syrian Arab Republic were now taking the northern route via Turkey. A few thousand had stayed there; a few thousand more had gone to Egypt and another thousand had gone to Gaza. In summer 2016, between 35,000 and 45,000 Palestine refugees had joined Syrians and other refugees and migrants on the way to Europe. It was difficult to document how many Palestine refugees had arrived in Europe because many had Syrian travel documents. The conflict in the Middle East could cause higher numbers of both Palestine and Syrian refugees to be displaced if the underlying causes were not addressed. European countries had seen worrying increases in the numbers of refugees arriving from the Middle East and those countries in particular should bear in mind that if UNRWA continued to be seriously underfunded and Palestinians continued to be faced with a closed political horizon and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, higher numbers would move elsewhere.

40. Of the Palestine refugees remaining in the Syrian Arab Republic, around 60 per cent had been displaced. Before the war, refugees had achieved a degree of self-sufficiency and dignity through access to employment. Although they had been sending their children to Agency schools, they ran businesses, shops and markets in Yarmouk and had been able to cover the needs of their families. However, 95 per cent of that refugee community was now dependent on Agency aid, which was focused on emergency response to basic needs such as medical care, food and cash distribution, and education. Education for Palestine refugees was vital and, in a demonstration of their resolve to keep their opportunities open, 80 per cent of the 3,000 Palestine refugees that had sat the national examinations in the Syrian Arab Republic had passed.

41. UNRWA was making a significant contribution to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 through long-term efforts in education, primary health care and other key areas. It had implemented cost-cutting measures, such as reductions in staff travel, and was seeking ways to sustain and diversify its funding base. Efforts to engage with the Gulf countries had been very successful over the previous decade, but the Agency was also working to build new partnerships with the World Bank and other actors, and to strengthen the support from countries such as Brazil, China, India and the Republic of Korea.

42. **Mr. Roet** (Israel) said that he had misheard the information given on the number of UNRWA staff members killed, but even one was too many and his delegation expressed its condolences for the loss of Agency workers regardless of where they had been killed and hoped for the return of missing staff members. The restrictions on the movement of Agency staff members had been imposed because of legitimate security concerns. It was unfortunate that several of his questions remained unanswered; in particular, the Commissioner-General had not explained why Hamas was not mentioned in his report.

43. In terms of advocacy, there was a plethora of United Nations agencies, organizations and other actors responsible for addressing issues surrounding the question of Palestine, and their high number meant that Palestine represented one of the loudest voices in the United Nations system. The mandate of UNRWA was to help Palestine refugees, and that is what it should do.

44. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that he welcomed the expression of condolences for the loss of UNRWA staff. It was clear that UNRWA and the State of Israel had different perspectives on certain issues, but he had always been keen to engage in dialogue with Israeli representatives from the Permanent Mission in New York or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with senior Israeli military officials. Although not all differences in perspective could be resolved, both parties could address the matters at hand in a very serious way, and he looked forward to ongoing dialogue in that regard.

*Statement by the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA*

45. **Mr. Halvorsen** (Norway), introducing the report of the Working Group (A/71/350), said that the Working Group was seriously concerned at the dire financial situation of UNRWA, which faced a shortfall of $74 million. Several donors had provided additional contributions and the Agency had implemented measures to improve the cost effectiveness of its programmes even further, but there was still a gap to bridge. The General Assembly and the international community were responsible for ensuring that the

Agency could fulfil its mandate and maintain its services at an acceptable level.

46. Concerned at the multiplication of crises and their impact on the Agency's operations and funding, the Working Group urged all Governments to increase their contributions to the Agency, in particular to its programme budget. Government contributions should keep pace with the requirement for the Agency to meet the growing needs of the Palestine refugee population and should take into account the effects of inflation and other factors driving the costs of providing services. In addition, all Governments should provide unearmarked multi-year funding, make sustained and predictable contributions to the Agency in line with the recommendations made at the World Humanitarian Summit, and disburse their contributions early in the year when feasible. That type of support would allow the Agency to better plan its activities.

47. The Agency should continue to implement measures to increase its efficiency while maintaining the quality of its services to Palestine refugees, and Member States should provide strong financial support for those efforts. Governments that had traditionally shown generosity towards Palestine refugees and to the Agency were urged to do their utmost to maintain or increase their funding to the Agency, and all Member States were encouraged to positively consider the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA (A/67/365) and all resolutions relating to the financing of the Agency with a view to addressing recurring budget deficits and sufficiently supporting the Agency's vital work.

48. The Working Group invited all Member States to consider its recommendations when assessing funding for UNRWA in 2017 and beyond. The Agency had made progress in its efforts to contain its costs; Member States should accompany those measures with adequate funding.

*General debate*

49. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the 30,000 Palestine refugees employed by the Agency were proof that refugees should be seen as agents for good, not as burdens, and that the Agency's remarkable work in harmonizing humanitarian and development aid could serve as a model for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The plight of Palestine refugees was a painful reminder that unresolved conflicts did not simply disappear with time, but were instead exacerbated in the absence of just solutions. Despite years of exile and the continued denial of their rights, the Palestine refugees remained resolute in their legitimate aspirations, convinced that international law and the arc of history would restore their rights.

50. States had a political, legal and moral obligation to uphold the commitments made in the New York Declaration by providing the world's millions of refugees and migrants with the humanitarian assistance that they needed, protecting their rights in accordance with international law and addressing the root causes of their displacement. The Palestine refugees must not be excluded from the rights and commitments affirmed in that Declaration. UNRWA, widely recognized as a stabilizing factor in the tumultuous region, had helped to alleviate the hardships of the Palestine refugees and had been a lifeline through cycles of conflict and upheaval. However, the longevity of its assistance to the Palestine refugees had only been possible thanks to the cooperation and support of donor and host countries.

51. In Jordan, the situation of the Palestine refugees remained stable, but needs had continued to grow as rising unemployment and poverty had left some 80 per cent of refugees struggling to meet basic needs. In Lebanon, pervasive instability, abject poverty and a lack of opportunities continued to have a severe impact on Palestine refugees, especially those who had fled the Syrian Arab Republic. Her delegation appreciated the Agency's continued efforts to increase refugees' access to the Lebanese labour market and its rebuilding of the Nahr el-Bared camp, but donor support was needed to assist the thousands still without shelter and to expedite completion of the reconstruction.

52. In Gaza, the punitive, unlawful Israeli blockade had caused aid dependency among most of the population. Without humanitarian assistance, even the most basic needs could not be met and socioeconomic conditions were at their lowest point since occupation had begun in 1967. Repeated military aggressions against the besieged Palestinian population had deepened the dire humanitarian crisis and increased reliance on UNRWA services for subsistence. Moreover, reconstruction — a humanitarian imperative for more than 60,000 displaced persons whose homes had been destroyed by the occupying Power in the 2014 conflict — remained painfully slow because of restrictions on the entry of essential construction materials.

53. In the West Bank, violent military raids by the occupying forces and other illegal practices such as house demolitions, forced displacements and movement restrictions, continued unabated. Such

actions had worsened the protection crisis for refugees, including Bedouins, who were at risk of forced displacement. The restrictions imposed by the occupying Power, together with frequent harassment and intimidation of Agency staff, continued to hamper UNRWA operations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the situation of Palestine refugees remained alarming as the crisis intensified. Of the 560,000 Palestine refugees present prior to the conflict, 120,000 had fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Europe or elsewhere; of those who remained, 95 per cent were dependent on UNRWA assistance for survival. Her delegation praised the Agency for its ability to maintain operations under such difficult and dangerous circumstances.

54. States should respect the principles of non-refoulement and equal treatment of refugees, and should ensure access for all refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict, including the Palestine refugees. In addition, humanitarian access should be granted at all times. Armed conflict, including foreign occupation, did not absolve parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law, and UNRWA must be allowed to carry out its mandate without hindrance and without the imposition of additional costs or burdens. Furthermore, all parties should refrain from actions that could undermine or endanger the safety, security and neutrality of UNRWA installations and staff. In that regard, Israel should be held accountable for its grave violations during its military aggression against Gaza in 2014, during which several UNRWA facilities, including schools sheltering thousands of civilians, had been struck by the Israeli occupying forces, causing death, injury and destruction.

55. As a result of structural underfunding and constant financial shortfalls, the Agency's core programmes were at risk of being reduced or interrupted, and the General Assembly must find a sustainable solution to prevent that from happening. Palestine was grateful for the international community's longstanding support for UNRWA and for the contributions from donor countries, but only further sustained support could resolve the funding shortfalls that were undermining the Agency's capacity to provide refugees with essential assistance. Urgent consultations should be held with all stakeholders to identify measures to put UNRWA on a stable financial footing so that it could carry out its activities effectively and in a predictable manner.

56. Given the realities on the ground and the persistent funding gaps, the Agency's funding model — based primarily on voluntary contributions for its core programmes — was not sustainable, and the international community had a collective responsibility to provide the Agency with the resources required to fulfil its mandate. Member States should support the draft resolution on the operations of UNRWA (A/C.4/71/L.9), which was aimed at ensuring continuity of assistance to the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation and ensuring the Agency's continued tangible contribution to regional stability.

57. The worsening plight of the Palestine refugees and the continued need for UNRWA underscored the need for a reinforced global commitment to uphold international law, engage proactively in conflict resolution and prevention, and tackle the root causes of forced and protracted displacement. Humanitarian assistance was imperative, but was not a solution. It was crucial to restore hope and a political horizon for the people in the region. To that end, Palestine called on the international community to mobilize the political will and action necessary to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and to achieve a just, comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, including a just solution for the Palestine refugees, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

58. **Mr. Arcia Vivas** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the Movement appreciated the tireless efforts, courage and dedication of UNRWA staff, who served in difficult and often dangerous conditions. Between 2011 and 2016, 30 staff members had lost their lives as a result of the conflict in the Middle East and another 35 were missing, detained; kidnapped or presumed to be detained. The Movement was seriously concerned at the violations of the immunity of UNRWA personnel and premises, and strongly condemned the killing of United Nations personnel and the destruction of United Nations premises. The mandated role of UNRWA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was essential in the absence of a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees that would include their rights under General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The Movement was gravely concerned at the critical situation of the refugees, whose lives the occupation continued to define adversely in every aspect, from security and freedom of movement to livelihoods and employment. Palestine refugees had continued to face serious protection challenges since 2014 and, in many places, faced existential threats, sinking deeper into poverty and desperation. The disastrous situation had been

exacerbated by the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

59. The illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade of Gaza continued to cripple its economy and stifle the population, preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid and basic materials for reconstruction, thus obstructing economic and social recovery. To enable UNRWA personnel to discharge their humanitarian duties freely, the occupying Power must immediately lift all its illegal restrictions on free, sustained movement of persons and goods between Gaza and the outside world, in compliance with international law. The international community must uphold its moral, political and legal responsibilities to bring an end to Israel's illegal policies and its violations against the Palestinian people. Israel, the occupying Power, must abide by its obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention) and relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

60. The Movement was also concerned at the situation of the Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and the further resulting displacement as thousands of them fled to other countries for safety, adding to the demands on UNRWA, particularly by increasing the need for emergency assistance. The Agency's persistent funding shortfall remained a concern, as it undermined its efforts to promote human development and meet refugees' needs in line with its medium-term strategy. It was imperative to close the gap between the needs of refugees and available resources. Urgent support from donors was therefore needed to support UNRWA programmes aimed at addressing the unemployment crisis, especially among Palestine refugee youth, and to enable the Agency to overcome its serious financial crisis, with increased expenditures arising from the grave socioeconomic and humanitarian situation and instability in all its fields of operation. The Movement thus continued to support General Assembly resolution 65/272 and encouraged efforts to explore the possibility of further funding from the Organization's regular budget.

61. The Movement supported the Agency's unwavering efforts to provide assistance to the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation despite many difficulties. However, the entire international community, in particular the Security Council, must intensify efforts to address the current political and humanitarian crisis and help advance credible peace negotiations towards an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the independence of a sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution for the Palestine refugee problem in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

62. **Mr. Chatzisavas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Liechtenstein and the Republic of Moldova, said that UNRWA played a crucial role in the region and Member States were responsible for creating an enabling environment for the Agency and for assisting it in bringing greater sustainability to its operations.

63. The European Union remained the largest provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees, and its member States had contributed almost half of all donor support to the Agency's programme budget and about 33 per cent of all contributions to its overall operations. New donors were urged to help share the burden by supporting both the Agency and Palestine refugees. However, the securing of additional funds could not be the only solution sought to the Agency's financial crisis. The Agency had made welcome efforts to reduce its programme budget deficit but it should implement further initiatives that would secure a medium-term budget and financial stability while ensuring that services were being delivered to the most vulnerable refugees.

64. The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza was creating instability and constituted a recipe for renewed conflict. While all international donors should swiftly honour pledges made at the Cairo International Conference on Palestine: Reconstructing Gaza, political progress was also vital. Israel should end the blockade and open crossings into Gaza while addressing legitimate security concerns. The lifting of restrictions on the movement of people, services and goods, especially dual-use items, was needed to allow reconstruction, service delivery and international infrastructure projects. Both parties were urged to promote confidence- and trust-building measures, and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian electricity agreement on 13 September was a welcome step in that regard. Improvement of the situation in the Gaza Strip would depend on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the full assumption of all government functions there by the Palestinian Authority. All sides should respect the ceasefire, and the illicit arms build-up by Hamas and other militant groups should stop.

65. The crisis in Syria was exacting a terrible toll on Palestine refugees and UNRWA staff, and Palestine refugees were too often arbitrarily deprived of humanitarian assistance. The European Union condemned the continued systematic abuses of human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly the Syrian regime and its allies. A renewed cessation of hostilities, together with safe, comprehensive and unhindered access to all those in need of humanitarian assistance, and efforts to find a political solution in line with the provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions and the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 could no longer be delayed.

66. The European Union acknowledged the massive efforts undertaken by countries in the region to manage the influx of refugees from Syria and would continue to support them as much as possible. It remained committed to supporting the Agency's work until a final and comprehensive settlement of the conflict had been reached. Regional partners could play a key role in changing the dynamics on the ground, including through discussions based on the Arab Peace Initiative. The European Union would continue working closely with the parties, Quartet partners and all other relevant stakeholders towards a two-State solution that would end the long-standing occupation and resolve all permanent status issues.

67. **Ms. Sughayar** (Jordan), noting with concern the persistent challenges facing UNRWA, said that the United Nations had a responsibility to provide the Agency — which it had mandated to provide services to Palestine refugees — with sustainable funding or to seek alternative sources of funding until lasting solutions to the refugee question and the broader question of Palestine had been found. The Agency's financial shortfall had been caused neither by an increase in the number of refugees nor by the Agency's continued provision of assistance but instead by the absence of a just and comprehensive solution to the refugee question. UNRWA did much more than provide basic services; it was the lifeline that fed the tenacity and resilience of over 5 million Palestine refugees, as well as an element of stability in a region repeatedly convulsed by unrest.

68. Without support from UNRWA, the repercussions for Palestine refugees would be inestimable, particularly for the young, who accounted for 50 per cent of all refugees. Furthermore, continuing to prevent that community from exercising its fundamental rights could drive some of its members to resort to violent extremism — an epidemic that already plagued the region. The attendant social disturbances tended to disproportionately affect the young, and the current volatile circumstances would not withstand further stoking of tensions. Member States must therefore work to formulate a comprehensive security scheme for Palestine refugees that included protection and guaranteed their livelihood.

69. Given that the refugee question had yet to be resolved, Palestine refugees could not be stripped of the status of refugee, nor could their reality or that of the assistance provided to them by UNRWA be denied. Therefore, the entire international community — not just host or donor countries — had a duty to help refugees by funding the activities of humanitarian agencies and examining alternative methods of securing sustainable, regular funding for UNRWA. By doing so, Member States would effectively promote the humanitarian values they worked to instil in their own societies; conversely, those values should serve as an incentive to assist those agencies under a sustainable, multi-year framework.

70. Jordan welcomed donor country assistance to UNRWA and supported the Agency's efforts to mobilize resources, pursue reforms and establish partnerships with international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations. Her Government had a strategic partnership with the Agency and was working to help it remedy its funding shortfall. As host country to 2 million registered Palestine refugees, Jordan granted Palestine refugees extensive opportunities and full civil, social and economic rights despite the country's limited resources and increasing pressure on its infrastructure. The Palestine refugee question, along with other core final status issues, was closely linked to her country's national interest. In that connection, initiatives taken by Jordan were aimed at putting an end to the Israeli occupation and bringing about the two-State solution, culminating in the establishment of a fully sovereign State of Palestine within 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Israeli occupation and the failure to uphold Palestinian rights constituted the only obstacles to achieving peace and resolving all final status issues. Funding for UNRWA must not be linked to the political complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the humanitarian role of the Agency must remain central. Investing in its sustainability was also an investment in the future of a generation of youth that UNRWA had enabled to persevere.

71. **Ms. Rodríguez Silva** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Israeli occupation had inflicted tremendous suffering on the Palestinian people and continued to be a major cause of instability in the region and further afield. Not content with simply

oppressing Palestinians, Israel, the occupying Power, was intent on destroying all development opportunities and rendering the two-State solution impossible. Resolving the Palestinian humanitarian crisis was inextricably linked to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as that would allow the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination under a free, sovereign and independent State. In the meantime, UNRWA was stretched to capacity as increasing numbers of Palestine refugees were in dire need of its services.

72. Venezuela condemned Israel's aggressions against Palestinians and its indiscriminate exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, which severely limited opportunities for economic development in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It called on Israel to end those practices, including its illegal settlement activities, and to lift the inhumane blockade in Gaza, where abject poverty and unemployment were creating uncertainty and despair for young Palestinians. Lifting the blockade was essential to ensure the viability of a future State of Palestine.

73. The United Nations must act to stop Israel's systematic violations of Palestinians' rights, including its excessive use of force, movement restrictions, house demolitions and forced displacements, all of which occurred in an administrative and legal environment that discriminated against Palestinians but treated Israeli perpetrators with impunity. The perpetrators of those war crimes should be prosecuted in accordance with international law. In addition, the international community should provide additional funding to UNRWA so that it could continue its invaluable work. However, in view of Israel's continued aggressions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza, and its apparent reluctance to assume its responsibilities under international law, other parallel measures were needed to protect Palestinians in the occupied territories, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention and Security Council resolution 904 (1994).

74. Special attention should be paid to Palestinian children, who suffered disproportionately at the hands of the Israeli forces. UNRWA was doing commendable work in providing food, education and health care for those victims, but additional support from donors and Member States was needed. Furthermore, the international community should condemn Israel's illegal practices in the Occupied Territories and Gaza, and the Assembly and the Security Council should adopt firm resolutions calling on Israel to put an end to its illegal settlement activity and cease construction of the wall of shame. The Council's continued silence on the matter implied complicity and support for the occupying Power's impunity.

75. The Venezuelan Government supported the two-State solution to the question of Palestine, and the establishment of a State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing side by side and in peace with Israel within 1967 borders. It also supported the efforts of the Quartet and called for a resumption of negotiations with a view to achieving a lasting settlement in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative. The State of Palestine should be granted full membership of the United Nations so that it could participate as an equal partner in peace talks, which was an essential step towards ending Israel's prolonged and illegal occupation.

76. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) said that UNRWA carried out vital work providing the 5 million Palestine refugees under its mandate with assistance in areas such as education and health care. In 2015, the Agency had educated 500,698 children, and the importance of the development aspect of that work could not be overstated. Not only did a quality education provide the most solid basis for development, but it also gave Palestine youth the much-needed hope to face the difficult conditions they had to endure daily. Furthermore, education was the first barrier against extremism and extremist thought.

77. The Agency's crucial development and humanitarian work could not be continued without adequate, predictable and sustainable funding, and his delegation called on international donors to maintain or even increase their generous support for the Agency. Egypt fully supported efforts to explore the possibility of further United Nations budgetary funding to UNRWA. The Agency had already exerted all possible efforts to ensure maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness across its operations, and was working to engage new donors, including from the private sector, and strengthen its good relations with current donors.

78. **Ms. Samarasinghe** (Sri Lanka) said that the maintenance of schools and educational infrastructure and the high standard of education guaranteed by UNRWA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory encouraged children and youth to turn away from violence and aspire to a better future, even under the dire circumstances. Her Government was deeply concerned about the human rights situation and the daily violence and humiliation endured by Palestinian women and children. After nearly 10 years of a land and sea blockade and repeated escalations of

hostilities, and in spite of limited educational opportunities, unemployment, lack of access to health care and other challenges, the Agency's work provided Palestinians living in Gaza with a semblance of hope.

79. Noting with concern the vulnerability and particular hardships suffered by Palestine refugees, she stressed that the principle of non-refoulement must be honoured with regard to those refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict, which had created large-scale movements of people and placed an added burden on the Agency. UNRWA had recently faced the most serious financial crisis in its history; its continued underfunding would give rise to a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions and would threaten the services rendered to the Palestinian people, with serious consequences for peace and security in an especially volatile region. The international community must therefore increase its contributions so that the Agency could continue its work.

80. Her delegation commended UNRWA staff for their courage and dedication in carrying out the Agency's mandate in dangerous circumstances, and categorically condemned all threats and attacks against United Nations personnel and premises. While Sri Lanka fully supported the Agency's work, a just and peaceful political solution was the only legitimate means of securing the future of Palestine refugees, and her Government supported the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the achievement of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders.

81. **Ms. Horsandi** (Israel) said that her country had always cooperated with UNRWA and had coordinated hundreds of projects that provided essential services to the Palestinian people. While UNRWA made a significant contribution to the welfare of Palestine refugees and their descendants, its alarming political agenda overshadowed its humanitarian activities. In stark contrast to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which had helped millions of refugees to restart their lives and provided a brighter future for the coming generations, UNRWA kept Palestinians in a perpetuated refugee status. By the Agency's count, the number of refugees had grown from hundreds of thousands at its inception to the over 5 million so-called refugees eligible for UNRWA services 66 years later. However, the UNHCR rule that a person who had taken residence in and become a citizen of another country would lose refugee status, if applied by UNRWA, would reduce the figure dramatically. Only in the Palestinian case did that restriction not apply.

82. The UNRWA education system promoted a one-sided narrative and fuelled false promises among new generations. Schools displayed maps showing so-called Palestine that ignored the existence of the State of Israel. Moreover, Palestinian children were encouraged to believe that the so-called right of return was the only solution, a belief symbolized by the decorative keys kept in many UNRWA camps. Instead of giving new generations keys to the past that only reinforced a distorted reality, the Agency should give them keys to the future, in keeping with its goal of fostering human development among Palestine refugees, by instilling tolerance in children instead of hatred. Education provided the promise of a better future for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

83. Once again, UNRWA had failed to uphold the standard of balanced and neutral reporting expected of United Nations bodies. The Agency's illegitimate political advocacy and its spokesperson's one-sided, provocative statements served the Palestinian narrative and agenda, to the detriment of UNRWA beneficiaries. Moreover, its report virtually avoided mention of the extremist terrorist organization Hamas, which viciously controlled the Gaza Strip, diverted humanitarian resources to rearmament and terror build-up, endangered the lives of Palestinian civilians and committed war crimes by using civilian areas to target Israeli citizens. UNRWA continuously called for accountability and transparency, and Israel expected the Agency to abide by those same standards in fulfilling its reporting obligations. Its report should therefore make clear that Hamas bore responsibility for the situation on the ground.

84. In cooperation with UNRWA, her Government was doing its utmost to improve the humanitarian conditions and standard of living of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip while safeguarding the basic security needs of Israeli citizens. Through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, it had enabled the shipment of over 6 million tons of building materials into Gaza. Despite the sharp increase in attempts to smuggle illicit items into the territory, Israel continued to facilitate the provision of equipment, materials and supplies to help rebuild Gaza. Nevertheless, its extensive cooperation with UNRWA was scarcely mentioned in that year's report, which paid much more attention to the situation of Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip than to the desperate plight of Palestine refugees fleeing Syria and the hurdles faced by UNRWA beneficiaries and workers in that country. It was disheartening that criticism of Israel took precedence over seeking ways to improve the situation of so many people. Her country sincerely

hoped that creating an environment conducive to enhanced economic activity would encourage the resumption of direct, unconditional negotiations leading to two States for two peoples, living side by side in peace and security.

85. In the light of the actual needs of Palestine refugees, caught in the turmoil that reigned in the Middle East, it was troubling that UNRWA continued to channel a significant portion of its budget to inflammatory political campaigns, at the expense of humanitarian assistance. The time had come to seize the opportunity borne by the winds of change blowing through the Middle East. Instead of another round of biased resolutions, her delegation encouraged the Agency to pursue a more constructive agenda in the service of a better future.

86. **Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea** (Mexico) said that the humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA to the Palestinian populations throughout the Near East was particularly important given the fragile security situation in the region, especially in Syria. The Agency's programmes were forced to operate in one of the worst humanitarian crises of the century, amidst mass displacement, civilian casualties and extensive damage to homes and civilian infrastructure. Member States must therefore work together to help resolve regional conflicts and establish a sustainable and lasting peace. In response to the Agency's funding shortfall, her Government had contributed $250,000 to its 2016 budget. Mexico remained committed to a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist and the establishment of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State within secure, internationally recognized borders, in line with Security Council resolutions.

87. **Ms. Pereira Sotomayor** (Ecuador) said that UNRWA staff worked courageously in extremely difficult conditions without the security afforded by the immunity normally enjoyed by the United Nations, its property, premises and personnel under the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. In that connection, Ecuador called on Israel, Syria and Saudi Arabia to abide by international law and abandon policies that hindered or delayed the Agency's humanitarian activities, which were a crucial element of regional stability.

88. The sharp rise in forced displacement had been met with reluctance on the part of certain countries to admit migrants and refugees. As a host country that had granted refugee status to over 60,000 people — the most in any Latin American country — Ecuador protected the human rights of its refugee population. All persons displaced by the events of 1967 and the subsequent hostilities had the right to return to their homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as well as the rights to self-determination, independence, sovereignty and recovery of their possessions; moreover, the principle of non-refoulement must be upheld in respect of Palestine refugees.

89. Numerous reports attested to growing regional instability and an upsurge in violence, marginalization and poverty in Palestine refugee communities. The Occupied Palestinian Territory was a hotbed of frustration and poverty. Deprived of all its rights, the Palestinian people lived in a state of moral and material annihilation, in dire need of continued assistance from UNRWA. Sufficient and predictable funding for the Agency's activities was therefore of the essence. Her delegation valued the generosity of the donors whose contributions had made it possible to overcome the Agency's funding shortfall. It also commended the Secretariat for its important role in facilitating consultations between intergovernmental bodies and private entities in order to identify additional sources of funding.

90. Seven decades after the founding of the United Nations, it was clear that peace was much more than the absence of war; above all, peace was defined by the presence of justice, dignity and development — ideals to which the Palestinian people, frustrated by the lack of political progress towards a negotiated two-State solution, could hardly aspire. The absence of political will to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and the indifference and indolence of the powers directly involved had forced Palestinians to survive in a protracted illegal situation. It was essential to determine the respective responsibilities of the United Nations and of other States, as well as the available legal means to put an end to the serious violations of international law. In closing, her delegation paid homage to Palestinians and Israelis who had lost their lives in the tragic conflict, as well as to United Nations staff members fallen in the line of duty in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Syrian Arab Republic.

91. **Mr. Chaichana** (Thailand), commending the Agency's invaluable work in providing humanitarian assistance to and fostering the human development of over 5 million Palestinians, said that the threats against UNRWA personnel and premises were alarming. His delegation was also concerned at the persistent funding shortfalls, which had undermined the Agency's ability to meet the needs of Palestine refugees, and it therefore called on Member States to provide sustained support

to UNRWA. His Government had made regular financial contributions to UNRWA since 1978 and had responded to the Agency's flash appeal for Gaza after the 2014 conflict. Moreover, it had collaborated with Japan to build Palestinian capacity in human resources management and tourism, as part of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development.

92. The fact that UNRWA was still providing assistance on the ground after 66 years of existence was a regrettable sign that sustainable peace remained elusive in the Middle East. Thailand urged the parties to make every effort to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable solution to the conflict through constructive negotiations, and it stood ready to alleviate the hardships of Palestine refugees and to support international initiatives to bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

93. **Mr. Almehairi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the services provided by UNRWA to Palestine refugees were especially vital in the light of the violence racking the region and exacerbating the refugee crisis. Moreover, the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, forced displacement and rise in home demolitions had caused Palestinian living standards to deteriorate. The state of despair among Palestine refugees had prompted many of them to flee on dangerous paths, while refugee youth were particularly vulnerable to being recruited and exploited by extremist groups. Those dire circumstances increased demand for UNRWA services. Member States must therefore maintain their support of the Agency and broaden its donor base.

94. The United Arab Emirates made an annual voluntary contribution of $1.8 million to the Agency's operational budget. In addition, it had pledged an additional $5 million in 2015 and $15 million in 2016 and 2017 in support of educational programmes for Palestine refugee students. Its contributions were also aimed at mitigating the psychological impact of armed conflict on the refugee student population and providing food assistance to the thousands of Palestine refugees affected by the Syrian conflict. Furthermore, his country was a member of the Agency's Advisory Commission and Steering Committee for the Resource Mobilization Strategy. While such contributions were beneficial, the only way to put an end to the suffering of Palestine refugees was to fundamentally resolve the refugee question in the context of a settlement of the question of Palestine. To that end, his delegation called on the international community to redouble its efforts to compel Israel to end its illegal occupation of Arab territories and comply with the relevant international resolutions, especially General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

*The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.*